TORONTO STAR 4/3/98

Martin Luther King's widow calls for 'truth commission'

Seeks probe into husband's 1968 assassination

ATLANTA (Reuters) — The widow of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. said yesterday she wants the U.S. government to establish a commission similar to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate the assassination.

"This commission would provide immunity and protection for persons who come forward and tell what they know about the assassination," Coretta Scott King said.

King does not believe James Earl Ray killed her husband and wants amnesty granted to anyone willing to reveal what they know about the 30-year-old case.

"No one has been brought to trial to answer for the assassination of my husband," she said. "This has been a source of immense frustration and pain for me personally and for our family.

"I had hoped that the emergence of new evidence over time would lead to a trial for Mr. Ray without my family's intervention or involvement," King told a news conference. "As new evidence accumulated, we became increasingly convinced that he was, in fact, innocent of killing my husband."

SCOTT KING

King died of a single gunshot to the heart as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tenn., April 4, 1968. More than a year later Ray, an escaped convict, was captured and subsequently pleaded guilty to the killing. Ray has since recanted that confession.

One of the first people to reach King's side after he was shot was Andrew Young, one of his top lieutenants.

Young, who went on to become a U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, a congressman and mayor of Atlanta, attended the news conference.

He said he and King's son, Dexter, met three weeks ago with Loyd Jowers, who then owned Jim's Grill, located across the street from the hotel.

Jowers told them that shortly before King was killed, five men came to his establishment and asked him to receive a package that someone would come by to claim. He claimed he knew two of the five men to be Memphis police officers.

Young said Jowers told him he opened the package and found a rifle inside. He hid the rifle in a back room of his tavern, and the day before King was shot, a man came by to claim it.

Jowers' lawyer Lewis Garrison said his client had not come forward during the past 30 years because he wanted immunity first.